

Bitchin' by fandammit

Series: [In Between Years \[2\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

She squeezes his arm. "It's not just you and El against the world any more, you know? You have people on your side -- both of you." She tips her head down to meet his eyes. "You know that, right?"

It's not a rhetorical question, though she wishes it could be. She knows she hadn't been there for him in the last year, just when he'd needed her the most. She'd promised him no more secrets, then let them both retreat into each of theirs for a whole year.

She wants to make sure she doesn't make that same mistake again.

Nancy picks up Mike from Hopper's cabin. Basically just Nancy interacting with Hopper, Mike and Eleven because S2 gave me far too few moments with them interacting.

Bitchin'

It's ten minutes until five-thirty when she pulls up to Hopper's cabin, which means she has roughly fifteen minutes until Mike will even begin to start being persuaded to leave El. She fully intends on just waiting in the car for him because while Hopper's cabin is cozy and cute for him and El -- especially so after she and Joyce had descended on it last month and helped clean and decorate it -- it's still small enough to feel crowded when there's three people in it.

Plus, Mike only gets these Tuesdays after school to spend time alone with El since the rest of the gang all head over on Wednesday and Thursday is just barely controlled chaos at the Byers house. She thinks he deserves that time with her after the year the two of them have had.

But then she sees Hopper standing on the porch, smoking a cigarette and staring off into the woods like he does, and it feels rude to sit in the car like he doesn't exist, so she grabs the stack of clothes in the seat next to her and gets out of the car.

"Hey, Hopper," she says, smiling because she's finally glad that it doesn't sound weird any more -- leaving the Chief off his name.

("You don't work for me and you don't report to me," he'd said one day at Thursday night dinner. "Just call me Hopper.")

"Hey, kid," he says, nodding at the bundle of clothes in her arms. "What's that?"

She climbs the steps slowly and holds out the stack of clothes for him to see.

"I was cleaning out my closet and I wanted to see if El wanted any of these."

He smiles, the expression softening the harsh lines of stress on his face.

"That's great. I'm sure she'll love them." He takes a drag of the

cigarette, making sure to blow the smoke away from her. "You can go on in. They're probably in her room doing multiplication tables, but I make 'em keep the door open, so nothing to worry about."

She tilts her head in confusion.

"Why would I be worried?"

He huffs out a laugh.

"Really?"

She squints at him, her brows drawing together in confusion.

"Well, they're fourteen."

He raises his eyebrow.

"And your point?" He says out loud, though his expression says something different, something about fourteen year old boys alone and behind closed doors with his daughter.

She wants to jump in and defend Mike, say that he's a good kid -- because he is -- and that he really cares about El -- because it's obvious to anyone within a five mile radius and working eyes that he does. But then she thinks about the boys that she knew at fourteen, and then thinks a little bit longer about the fact that she really doesn't want to think about her brother also being a fourteen year old boy.

So she points out something that's equally as true.

"My point is that El could throw him across the room without even laying a hand on him if he ever tried anything that she didn't want."

He blinks at her and then lets out a small chuckle.

"Touche, kid, touche."

She smiles, satisfied, before resting against the railing next to him.

"I'll go inside in a few minutes. Jonathan picked up an extra shift, so

I'm here a little earlier than usual."

Hopper frowns.

"Again? That's the third one in a week."

She sighs.

"His car needs repairs -- again, I know -- so he needs the extra money."

Hopper tilts his head at her, a look of confusion on his face.

"Joyce didn't mention it."

She looks away. Crap. She forgot that he hadn't told his mom.

"Oh, well, um, it just happened a few days ago."

Hopper raises an eyebrow at her.

"And I have lunch with Joyce basically every weekday. It seems like something she would mention."

Now it's Nancy's turn to raise an eyebrow. Lunch everyday, huh? She tucks that bit of information away before clearing her throat and turning towards Hopper.

"Oh, well, he hasn't exactly told his mom."

Hopper takes a drag of his cigarette and shakes his head as he blows out the smoke.

"He hasn't exactly meaning he hasn't at all?"

She huffs out a laugh.

"Yeah, but -." She glances over at him and then shrugs. "He just doesn't want her to worry."

Hopper sighs as he puts out his cigarette.

“Christ, that kid just needs a new car,” he says, shaking his head.

“Hence the extra shifts,” she replies with a wry smile.

He makes a humming sound in the back of his throat, a contemplative look on his face, before he motions towards the door.

She picks up the stack of clothes, following him into the house just in time to hear Mike say, “Quiet please! El is about to start a practice test.”

She sits down at the table, amused as Mike starts a stopwatch and El begins running her pencil furiously over what looks to be a serious of multiplication problems. She glances over at Hopper and sees how closely he’s staring at El, muttering encouraging phrases that are too quiet to be heard. She looks over at Mike and sees almost the exact same expression on his face, and it’s frankly so adorable that she wishes desperately that she had Jonathan’s camera with her to capture the moment.

About two minutes later, El puts down her pencil.

“Done,” she says with a triumphant grin, pushing the paper towards Mike. He grabs a pen from next to him on the floor, checking off each problem quickly before looking up at her with a wide grin.

“100% El! You’ve officially learned your multiplication tables!”

He makes a move like he’s about to reach out and hug her, then glances over to where Nancy and Hopper are sitting and quickly shifts it into an awkward pat on her shoulder instead.

El, on the other hand, seems to completely disregard both her and Hopper, and leans forward to kiss Mike on the lips before grabbing the paper and jumping up from where they’re both seated on the floor.

Hopper makes a sound deep in his throat, but doesn’t say anything. And honestly, given the look on Mike’s face right now as his eyes dart between El and Hopper, it doesn’t seem like he really needs to.

She bounds over to where Hopper’s standing and shows him the

paper.

“100 percent!” She says, practically bouncing on her toes, a wide grin lit across her face as she reaches out and wraps her arms around him.

He smiles down at her, wrapping his arm around her as he drops a kiss in her curly mass of hair.

“Nice job, kid, I knew you could do it.” He gestures over to Nancy. “Nancy’s got something you might like -- why don’t you take a look while Mike cleans up.” He pushes El towards her bedroom, gesturing for Nancy to follow her.

El settles on her bed, looking at at Nancy with curious expression her eyes.

Nancy sits down next to her and pushes the stack of clothes onto her lap.

“I was going through my closet and I wanted to see if you wanted any of these.”

El stares at the clothes, her fingertips gently brushing over the folds of fabric.

“Pretty,” she says quietly, turning her head up to look at Nancy with something that resembles awe. “For me?”

Nancy smiles.

“Yeah, it’s for you. I mean, whatever you want.” She casts a critical eye at the clothes. “And you don’t have to take them all - just whatever you actually like. It won’t hurt my feelings or anything.”

El looks at her, uncertain, but Nancy just smiles at her in a reassuring way, trying to encourage her to look through the stack.

She unfolds each piece of clothing one by one, running her hands over the fabric, turning it this way and that before she sets them down. Slowly, she splits the clothes into two different piles. The one closest to her -- the one Nancy assumes she wants to keep -- is filled with cooler, more dulled tones, maroons and mustards and faded

pinks. She takes a jean jacket that Nancy bought once on a whim and never wore, a tartan skirt that never really seemed to fit her style. She notices that El shies away from anything too bright or too loud, and wonders if a lifetime of trying not to be noticed has somehow bled over into her fashion choices, too.

When she's done, she hugs the new stack of clothes to her chest and smiles at Nancy, a little shy at the edges, but a real smile nonetheless.

"Thank you," she says, a little bit of that awed look sneaking back into her eyes.

Nancy smiles.

"You're welcome, El." She pauses, and realizes that she's never outright spoken her name aloud to her face for all that she's thought it in her head. Mike and the boys still call her El, while Hopper and Joyce have taken to calling her Jane. She doesn't really belong in either group -- just hears Mike call her El enough to go along with it. She tilts her head in the other girl's direction. "El or Jane? Which one do you want me to call you?"

El stares at her for a long, intense moment, and Nancy can see her considering the question carefully.

"El," she finally says, her tone resolute as she glances between Nancy and Mike.

Nancy nods before getting up off the bed, taking the discarded pile of clothes with her.

"See you at Thursday night dinner?"

El nods, her arms still wrapped around the newly acquired clothes. She's wearing an oversized men's flannel that can only once have belonged to Hopper over a small grey shirt that she feels like must've once belonged to Will. Nancy frowns, and glances over at the open door of El's closet -- sees one dress hanging amidst a jumbled mishmash of men and boy's clothing.

She furrows her brow as she leaves the room, chewing on her lip as an idea comes to her.

She glances over to where Hopper is cutting vegetables for tonight's dinner, then walks over to where Mike's waiting by the door, his backpack slung over one shoulder.

"Hey, go ahead to the car, I'm gonna ask Hopper something."

Mike squints at her, his placid expression melting into look of deep suspicion.

"About what? Why? What are you going to ask him?"

She rolls her eyes and pushes him towards the door.

"Nothing about you, I wanna ask something about El."

It's apparently the exact wrong thing to say, because Mike's frown just deepens even further and he actually plants his feet and crosses his arms as he turns to face her.

"What about El?"

She lets out a heavy sigh and puts her hands on both his shoulders.

"I'm going to ask him if I can take El out to get some new clothes this weekend because she deserves to have her own clothes, not just hand me downs from me and Hopper." She shakes her head just as he opens his mouth. "And no, you can't come, because she'll need to try on clothes and it might be awkward if you're there and I want her to get things she wants and that she thinks look good, not things she thinks you want."

She keeps her hands on his shoulders until he relaxes, his arms hanging loosely at his side as he nods.

"You know you don't have to protect her all the time, right? She can take care of herself."

He looks abashed at that, scuffs his foot against the floor.

"Yeah, I know - I just - I don't know." He blows out a puff of air, glancing helplessly at the door like it'll have an answer.

“Hey, I get it,” she says, because she does. There are times when she wants nothing more than just to wrap her arms around El, who has those wide brown eyes that have seen too much, that tattoo on her wrist that means she’s suffered more than her fair share. And she doesn’t even have half of Mike’s experience with her.

Still though -- she knows the frustration of not being taken at your worth, the resentment that can build at the feeling of being smothered. She doesn’t want that for her brother or El.

She squeezes his arm. “It’s not just you and El against the world any more, you know? You have people on your side -- both of you.” She tips her head down to meet his eyes. “You know that, right?”

It’s not a rhetorical question, though she wishes it could be. She knows she hadn’t been there for him in the last year, just when he’d needed her the most. She’d promised him no more secrets, then let them both retreat into each of theirs for a whole year.

She wants to make sure she doesn’t make that same mistake again.

“Mike?” She asks, brushing away that long thatch of hair that’s forever getting in his eyes.

He finally meets her gaze and nods, gives her a smile that’s as awkward as it is genuine.

“Yeah, I know, Nancy.” He runs his hand through his hair. “Ok, I’ll meet you in the car.”

He looks past her shoulder one more time, back into El’s bedroom, before turning and heading out the door.

She turns to where Hopper is standing, walks over slowly and clears her throat.

He glances over at her but keeps cutting the carrot.

“Everything ok with you two?”

She nods, then realizes he can’t see her.

“Yeah, we’re fine. Just sibling stuff.” She looks over to El’s bedroom, sees the younger girl trying on her old a grey and blue sweater with light pair of jeans and smiles. “I was wondering -- and I know that we still have to be really careful -- but I was thinking that it’d be nice to go out and get El some clothes of her own.”

Hopper stops cutting and sets down the knife, an indiscernible look on his face. It doesn’t seem like an outright no at least, so she continues. “All she has are these hand me down clothes from you and Will and now me, and, I don’t know, I think it’d good to get something just for her, you know? Something that she really wants to get. Something - something unique, distinct.”

“Bitchin’,” she hears El say behind her, a touch of amusement in the words. She sees the corner of Hopper’s mouth twitch, like he wants to smile but is trying not to, looks over at El to see a similar expression on her face.

“Yeah, um, bitchin’,” she says, her own mouth turning up at the word. She looks over at Hopper.

“I could take on a Saturday, somewhere far out of town, like Columbus or Bloomington. I mean, those are big enough cities that no one’s gonna notice two girls out for a shopping trip. We could leave early and be back by mid-afternoon, and I’d make sure that -- .”

“That’s fine with me,” Hopper says, interrupting her. He leans back against the counter and flicks his gaze between her and El. “I think it’s a good idea.”

She blinks rapidly. She actually expected more of a discussion, but when she looks around and sees how El is beaming at Hopper, the way her entire body is lit up with excitement, she understands why it was so easy.

Nancy grins up at him.

“Perfect! We’ll talk details at Thursday night dinner.”

He rolls his eyes.

“If we can somehow manage to be heard over the chaos at the dinner

table, sure.”

Nancy laughs, and turns around to find herself facing El. The younger girl hesitates for a moment before wrapping her arms around Nancy.

“Thank you, Nancy,” she says quietly, squeezing her once before stepping back with an awkward look on her face.

Nancy smiles.

“Get ready to pick out some bitchin’ outfits, El.”